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Liberating the open and distance learning model from the chains of oppressive education theories

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This study argues that open and distance learning (ODL) continues to function as a platform for producing factory-like workers and white-collar laborers whose primary function is to serve the capitalist labor market. The study draws on Bowles and Gintis' correspondence theory, as well as the Factory Education Model (FEM), and the Industrialized Teaching Model (ITEM) by Otto Peters, as theoretical propositions to explain how schooling contexts and the hidden curriculum prepare students the interests of employers (capitalists) and the powerful elites of modern society. While the findings of this study are applicable across various higher education contexts, ODL has significantly demonstrated a strong alignment with the predictions of the correspondence theory, FEM and ITEM, probably due to its mode of delivery and historical foundations. While some scholars may find these parallels unremarkable, the reality remains that existing ODL policies and practices continue to perpetuate epistemological injustices, stifling human agency, and curtailing various freedoms. Based on this, this study has proposed educational practices that are grounded in the principles of engaged and critical pedagogy, as advocated by Paulo Freire and bell hooks, as the most effective means of countering the harms perpetuated by FEM and ITEM. Methodologically, this study utilized a qualitative research design using critical hermeneutics, along with discourse analyses, observations, and lived experiences. Critical hermeneutics was chosen for its ability to reveal power relations and ideologies that perpetuate hegemony, domination, exploitation, and control over powerless individuals.

KEYWORDS

curriculum justice, distance education, access, liberation, capitalism, taylorism

Introduction

In their seminal work on Education in Capitalist America, scholars Bowles and Gintis (1976) presented controversial findings within the framework of *Correspondence Theory*. They established a significant correlation between the education of working-class students (poor students) and the laborers at the workplace.

In essence, Bowels and Gintis argued that the schooling context and its curriculum were deliberately designed to serve the interests of the capitalist labor market. This implies that the schooling environment was deliberately to designed to shape student behavior both in educational institutions and later in the workplace.

Defending their arguments, Bowles and Gintis cited curricula and common practices in schools which are aimed at developing individuals who are loyal, passive, docile, resilient, and uncritical—traits that align with the needs of capitalist organizations and minimize resistance. For example, Bowles and Gintis noted that both schools, especially at the primary and secondary levels, just like factories and/or companies, emphasized the use of uniforms, time management, strict hierarchical authority, and a system of rewards, motivations, sanctions,

and punishments. Additionally, both environments maintained rigid schedules for breaks, holidays, and vacations, all of which demanded unwavering compliance at the expense of human agency.

They further argued that these similarities were not mere coincidences but carefully thought-through ideologies designed to indoctrinate students into the capitalist labor-market, where passivity, docility, and conformity are highly valued. According to them, schools have long acted in the best interests of the capitalist system and the owners of production. Summarizing their argument, Bowles and Gintis (2003) used the phrase, *work casts a long shadow over schooling*, signifying the enduring impact that schools have had on molding individuals to fit the needs of the capitalist workforce.

Although some critics have questioned the Correspondence Theory, primarily due to the historical context in which the study was conducted and the lack of empirical research by its original proponents, scholars such as Michael Apple and and others (see Apple, 1988, 2001), have continued to build on the foundational work of Bowles and Gintis. Similarly, Marshall (1990), Robinson (1992), Peters (1998), Cubberley (1998) and Strauss (2015) have joined Michael Apple in defending the arguments presented in the Correspondence Theory through the frameworks of the Industrialized Teaching Theory (ITEM) and the Factory Education Model (FEM). This study argues that, despite criticisms regarding its age, the Correspondence Theory remains a relevant framework for understanding educational practices and policies. It continues to offer valuable insights for analyzing and addressing inequities in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly within the context of open and distance learning (ODL) in Malawi and beyond.

Structurally, this study presents background developments within the context of ODL in Malawi. It then briefly discusses the Correspondence Theory, the FEM, and the ITEM of ODL to establish their interrelationships and how they contribute to inequitable practices in educational contexts. The study finally proposes possible solutions for addressing epistemological injustices perpetuated by FEM and ITEM, drawing on Freire (2005), *Critical Pedagogy*, and hooks (1994) *Engaged Pedagogy: Teaching to Disgrace* as the best education theoretical propositions for debunking and undoing curriculum and cognitive injustices in ODL contexts. Methodologically, this study utilized hermeneutic interpretivism due to its ability to illuminate long-held ideologies that have often created and perpetuated epistemological injustices and harms (see Husserl, 1962, 1970). It thus analyzed policy documents, journal articles, book chapters, and different websites to gain entry into the common policies and practices that govern ODL practices in Malawi and elsewhere. Generally, this is a phenomenological research guided by the qualitative research design, which follows the critical hermeneutic interpretivist tradition in data analysis.

Background to the study

Since this study has used ODL contexts in Malawi as the main unit of analysis, this portion must be dedicated to the study site. However, this does not limit the applicability of the findings to other ODL contexts elsewhere, given the complexity of the Correspondence Theory. Essentially, ODL was introduced in Malawi under the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) in 1965, soon after Malawi became independent from the British Protectorate (see

Chimpololo, 2010; Zozie, 2020; Chibambo, 2009; Chibambo, 2023a,b). The idea behind embracing ODL was meant to train knowledgeable workers who would replace white expatriates (Chibambo, 2009, 2016, 2023a,b; Chimpololo, 2010; Chibambo and Jere, 2018a,b). Up until 1998, ODL was offered only at primary and secondary school levels (Chimpololo, 2010; Zozie, 2020; Chibambo, 2023a,b). As Chibambo and Divala (2023a), Zozie (2020), Namphande (2007), and Chakwera and Saiti (2005) contend, schools and universities became overpopulated by increased student enrolment numbers seeking further education soon after free primary education (FPE) was introduced in 1994, following the advent of multiparty democracy. Consequently, these developments led to shortages of all human, material, and financial resources and space at all three educational levels of Malawi, that is, basic, secondary, and tertiary levels (see Namphande, 2007). As a result of the Education for All Movement and EFAs (see UNESCO, 2000; Education for All Movement, 2000), ODL was officially adopted in Malawi's HEIs contexts to address challenges of space shortages and also as an attempt to meet international obligations on access to education (Chibambo, 2023a,b; Chizengo, 2023; Mzuzu University, 2021; MZUNI ODeL Draft Report, 2023; MUBAS, 2020; Zozie, 2020).

Since its adoption, the main issues have concerned the selection of suitable instruction media, employing teaching staff unique to ODL or the use of face-to-face (f2f) staff, and/or how best to support students while at a distance. The understanding was that f2f staff members should also support ODL students, provided they are paid some additional compensation for overtime despite being overworked. Operationally, ODL students come to the university for a one-month contact session before they go home for 5 months of independent studies before returning to the universities for examinations until they finish their degree programmes (see Chibambo, 2023a,b; Msiska, 2015; Msiska, 2006). At home, science students are supported by secondary school teachers who are paid by hosting universities, while students from other non-science programmes fend for themselves (see Zozie, 2020). In terms of instructional media, ODL utilized both print and digital resources until 2020, when a new policy was introduced requiring every ODL student and facilitator to use Moodle for teaching and learning purposes. This, however, had been implemented without any feasibility studies regarding its suitability and affordability, especially for a country where 82% of the people are rural-poor farmers with limited access to stable incomes, electricity, and the Internet (Chibambo, 2023a,b; Zozie, 2020; Borgen Report, 2021; Zozie and Chawinga, 2016).

Since then, five of the six public universities in Malawi such as the Mzuzu University (MZUNI), the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS), the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), the University of Malawi (UNIMA) and the Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHES) minus the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) have all introduced ODL programmes for purposes of increasing access to higher education; as an income-generating activity (IGA) to supplement limited and delayed subvention from the government, and in response to local and international instruments such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MGDs), Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) (see United Nations, 2021); the EFAs and the Malawi Vision 2063 (National Planning Commission, 2020), all of which have advocated for increased access to quality and equitable education while recognizing education as a human right (see Mzuzu

University, 2022; MUBAS ODeL Policy Report, 2023; Chizengo, 2023; Chibambo, 2024; National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESP), 2020; Malawi Vision-2063, 2020; African Union, 2016; Moriaty, 2019; Atim, 2017).

Distance education within the contexts of higher education in Malawi

According to Msiska (2015) and Chibambo (2009), it was between 2000 and 2011 that distance education was theoretically introduced both at MZUNI and at the Domasi College of Education (DCE), respectively. This idea came about because different studies had established that there was a shortage of 10,000 teachers in secondary schools following the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) and EFAs (see UNESCO, 2000; UNESCO, 2005; Msiska, 2006), which culminated into a shortage of human, financial, and material resources as well as limited classroom and accommodation infrastructure at all three educational levels of Malawi. Essentially, FPE resulted in many children, who could not afford fees, enroll for primary education, and this translated into multitudes of primary school leavers enrolling for secondary schools and, finally, a myriad of secondary school leavers wanting to enroll for tertiary education, respectively. They were these chains of events that piled pressure at the subsequent levels of education, hence asking for the authorities to find means that would contain the problems that were initially overlooked at the planning phase, for example, balancing the demands for universal access to education with the questions of quantity, quality, and epistemological justice, or more specifically, the questions of physical access against epistemological justice (see Chibambo, 2009, 2023a,b; Ngobeni et al., 2023; du Plooy and Zilindile, 2014; Gamede, 2005). Furthermore, Msiska (2006) and Nsapato (2017) report that both MZUNI and DCE were founded in response to the need for teachers in the newly introduced Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs), teacher attrition for greener pastures locally and internationally, and sharp increases in student enrollments at all levels of the education system. Similarly, Msiska (2015) and Msiska (2013) asserts that both MZUNI and DCE began with education programmes simply because education was highlighted by the SDGs and donors as the priority area for Malawi's socio-economic growth and development (see United Nations, 2021). As a result, with support from donors such as USAID and the Japanese International Corporation (JICA), DCE became more vibrant than other HEIs until the donors handed over their projects to the Ministry of Education, which unfortunately could not sustain them.

While ODL at MZUNI was theoretically founded in 2006, it admitted the first cohort of 37 students in 2011 under the Faculty of Education (Chibambo, 2023a,b; Chibambo and Jere, 2018; Zozie, 2020; Msiska, 2006, 2007, 2013, 2015). To date, 12 cohorts have been enrolled, with a total student population of two thousand seventy-eight (2,078) and an average enrollment of between 700 to 500 students per year. The issue here is that while MZUNI has made significant strides in student enrollment, it has faced challenges due to disproportionate increases. This university took 5 years to enroll its first cohort due to institutional politics, cultural resistance, management biases, lack of quality instructional materials, and non-availability of definitive ODL policies. Moreover, Msiska (2015) and Zozie (2020) argue that since MZUNI ODL was initially perceived as a project and a "cash cow" to be executed at the abattoir, epistemological injustices such as knowledge commodification

(profitization), poor-quality education offerings (Chibambo, 2023a,b), overt and covert economic exploitation and subjugation (Drew, 2013; Pelletier, 2009), and general economic warfare (but not welfare) have typified Marxist capitalism and made ODL operate within a neo-capitalist environment (also see Drew, 2013, 2023; Chibambo, 2023a,b; Mackenzie and Gabriel, 2017; Chernoff, 2013; Major, 2006). For example, mixed-methods studies by Zozie (2020), Zozie and Chawinga (2016), Chibambo (2023a,b); have all revealed that since the inception of ODL at MZUNI, there have been a lot of unresolved issues between management and academics, students and management, academics and the ODeL secretariat, demonstrating that the system has generally lacked intrinsic passion for ODL, its facilitators, and students alike, hence subjecting them to stringent psychological, moral, economic, and cognitive depravations. Similarly, Msiska (2013) and Makoe and Gatsha (2020) concede that frustrated facilitators can lead to high-grade systems failure in terms of compromised student support services, erratic examinations and compensational procedures for service providers, and poor-quality education offerings, among others. Similar problems were also reported at LUANAR and MUBAS, although the lack of definitive ODL policies was captured as a key trigger to the challenges ODL was facing (see Chibambo, 2024; Chizengo, 2023; Atim, 2017).

On the other hand, LUANAR founded her ODL in 2016 with an initial student enrollment of 441. Since then, the university has managed to offer education to active workers, the elderly, prisoners, the disabled (PWDs), and young adults who would have otherwise been excluded by the f2f traditional delivery mode. It is also claimed that this university has managed to reduce the cost of education in terms of teaching space, accommodation, utility bills, insurance bills, and medical bills. It has also helped increase enrollment rates while maximizing staff use, as they now service two universities in one (see Kaude, 2015; Nyirenda and Tostensen, 2009; Atim, 2017). LUANAR claims to have become a Centre of Excellence by providing programmes in the agri-science fields while providing equitable access to quality education through sustainable technologies. The university also claims to adhere to the philosophies of ODL, especially those that demand openness, flexibility, integrity, collaboration, innovation, and excellence (see Atim, 2017). Some good examples to justify their claims include the increased student enroll, which reached 1,500 by 2020, and the provision of multiple entries and exit points for their students, signifying the ability of ODL to rapidly increase enrollments and its flexibility and adaptability to the changing times.

Although LUARNAR has achieved such milestones, it still has experienced serious challenges in achieving epistemological access to higher education, given its failure to have an active ODeL policy and institutional politics, just like the MZUNI case. Its efforts to create an inclusive university for the people and its desire to become an international leader may have become transient given its failure to account for epistemological access and justice, within which quality, equity, and equality are embedded notions (see Chibambo, 2023a,b; Gamede, 2005; Morrow, 2009). Although epistemological access is often discussed rhetorically in HEI contexts, it remains an illusion within ODL contexts influenced by open-market and minimalist neoliberal policies, which are (of course) the primary products of Marxist capitalism.

In addition to the above, MUBAS, established by Act No. 19 of 2019, after being de-linked from the University of Malawi (UNIMA) in 2021, has managed to enroll approximately 7,000 students globally.

Here, ODL was established in 2019 following the institution's strategic plan and financial support from USAID through the Strengthening Higher Education Access Malawi Activity (SHEAMA) Project and the Skills for Vibrant Economy (SAVE) Project. These projects have mainly focused on imparting critical market-relevant skills to the youth to help them contribute toward Malawi's socio-economic growth and development. Furthermore, these projects have also aimed to increase access to quality and equitable higher education in Malawi through infrastructure development, staff training, and scholarships (Chiwayula, 2022). According to Chizengo (2023), the ODL Department at MUBAS has facilitated the development and management of instructional materials and provided student support services to ODL students. In the main, ODL at MUBAS has mainly aimed at increasing access to equitable, quality, and relevant education as articulated in the MDGs SII and SDGs (see United Nations, 2021; World Bank Group, 2014). Chezengo further notes that ODL has since then provided the most feasible option for enhancing innovation, entrepreneurship, industry engagement, community outreach programmes, and institutional governance while strengthening the financing and resourcing options of MUBAS in line with its strategic plan and the Malawi Vision-2063 (see World Bank Group, 2014; Chizengo, 2023). Despite these achievements, MUBAS faces challenges similar to those encountered by MZUNI and LUANAR (see Zozie, 2020; Chizengo, 2023; Chibambo, 2023a,b). For example, lack of definitive ODL policy (see MZUNI ODeL Draft Policy, 2022), institutional politics, inadequate staffing levels, delayed instructional materials, inadequate funding (see Chibambo, 2023a,b; Zozie, 2020), and the need for economies of scale to sustain the programmes (see Msiska, 2015; Msiska, 2006) have all become critical obstacles toward the successful path of ODL programmes. These challenges have often put pressure on how ODL institutions can balance the need for increased access to education (physical access) against quality and equitable educational offerings (epistemological access and justice). Within epistemological access paradigms, key concerns have mainly bordered on human rights, quality, inclusion, participation, democracy, transgressive and just pedagogy, evaluation, and all forms of student-facilitator support services within education contexts (see Chibambo, 2023a,b; du Plooy and Zilindile, 2014; Morrow, 2009).

Drivers of access to higher education in Malawi and distance education

According to Agabu (2021), increasing access to higher education, improving leadership and governance structures, enhancing pedagogy standards, and providing institutional autonomy, growth, and development have often remained key concerns for Malawi's educational systems. Despite having six public universities and several private universities, equitable access to higher education has remained one of the key challenges in Malawi, raising questions over the effectiveness of the efforts made by the government, HEIs, and donors toward universal access to equitable and quality education. For example, as of 2023, access to higher education was still as low as 4% (see World Bank Group, 2014, 2017; Nsapato, 2017; Chibambo, 2023a,b), although some statistics give us plus or minus the 4% enrollment proximities, which is one of the lowest enrollment rates globally. Essentially, HEIs in Malawi have only managed to enroll approximately 80,000 students for every 100,000 inhabitants,

compared to 211,000 for the whole Sub-Saharan region (World Bank Group, 2014, p. 2). The World Bank has further observed that the MGDs II has provided an ideal framework for guiding improvement plans in higher education, including adopting ODeL. To this end, the Bank recommended that African countries develop comprehensive Quality Assurance Frameworks (QAFs) to guide higher education agendas in Africa (also see Mohee and Isaacs, 2020). It also urged governments to balance physical and epistemological access by availing sustainable financing options (Nsapato, 2017). It further recommended introducing good governance structures, which would then improve the management of universities.

The Bank also made some recommendations to increase access to quality education in Malawi. These include supporting the MGDSII, which recognizes HEIs as critical drivers of socio-economic growth and development; restructuring HEIs to accommodate more students and achieve equitable enrollment rates, and developing higher-quality programmes that align with market needs. The Bank equally observed that there were too few qualified graduates who would best address the socio-economic development needs of Malawi and that universities should collaborate with the private sector to support curriculum practices that align with market needs. It further urged governments to support private institutions and explore sustainable financing and resourcing options to fill the gaps created by neoliberal minimalism policies (Nsapato, 2017; Chibambo, 2023a,b). It finally urged HEIs to explore the utilization of feasible and sustainable delivery modes such as ODeL and block releases, which can fast-track access to equitable and quality higher education in the short, medium, and long term.

These recommendations demonstrated that f2f delivery modes have essentially failed to deal with problems of universal access to quality higher education, reinforcing the need for ODL as the feasible option for offering education to the citizenry. Even then, ODL alone has proved to be worthless if it is not guided by instruments that can support epistemological access in education. While MZUNI, LUARNAR, MUBAS, UNIMA, and KUHES have positively responded to the World Bank and UN's call for transforming higher education by introducing ODL programmes (see Zozie, 2020; Msiska, 2015; Msiska, 2013; Msiska, 2007; Msiska, 2006), MUST is yet to do so for reasons this study has not been able to establish, and this should be one of the areas for further research.

Given the global political and technological changes, there is an urgent need for democratized education models that address the contemporary realities of our times by preparing citizens who function effectively in the 21st-century. This entails fostering capabilities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2010; Nussbaum, 2006; Apple, 2001) that enable individuals to thrive within social spaces. Central to this vision is an education system that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and humanization ideals (see Freire, 2005). Additionally, as Biesta (2020) highlighted, education should focus on three core values: qualifications (certificates and job skills), cohort socialization (building sociability and relationships), and subjectification (fostering agency, freedoms, civic values, political participation, critical thinking, and rationalization) (see Chibambo and Divala, 2023).

In this context, we observed that the introduction of e-learning through Moodle at MZUNI has exacerbated digital divide gaps among students and lecturers from different cultural, economic, and age backgrounds. This outcome undermines the core philosophy of ODL, which prioritizes openness, flexibility, equitability, inclusion, and

justice for all. Similar issues were reported by Simpson (2015) who found that universities in Oceania, Europe, the UK, Asia, and America experienced significant challenges when e-learning was introduced without adequate feasibility studies, leading to costly, stratifying, and potentially catastrophic consequences for higher education institutions, parents, and students. Moreover, Peters (1998) deliberately introduced automation to ITEM after studying the influence of the industrial revolutions on ODL and prospects for total automation of education, which would eventually have serious implications on critical thinking and human agency (also see Feenberg, 2002). Essentially, ITEM, in its later versions, deliberately added mechanization, objects, and objectification to accommodate e-learning and its consequences for users. Thus, scholars such as Peters (1998), Friesen (2008), Feenberg (2002), and Feenberg (1999) have all contended that it is such conversion of objects (learning objectives) into modules that has led to human objectification as the objects are given more preference than human-beings. When content is repackaged, repurposed, rebranded, marketed, and sold to disparate students through ODL, then education gets commodified as it is sold at a much higher price than that of the physical goods (see Roberts and Peters, 2008), hence culminating into epistemic neo-capitalism. Accordingly, this study sought to make a case for the Correspondence Theory, the FEM, and ITEM as timeless critical theories that can help us analyze curriculum injustices within the contexts of ODL and higher education. Since these theories have been subject to misinterpretation in education, we have proposed bell hooks' Engaged Pedagogy as a supplementary theoretical proposition due to its ability to destabilize the injustices emanating from an overt and covert interpretation of the three theories. It is envisaged that by deploying bell hooks alongside Paul Freires Critical Pedagogy, possible epistemological injustices, and harms caused by intended or unintended theoretical abuses and contradictions will be addressed.

The correspondence theory as a theory of and for education

According to Bowles and Gintis (1976, 2003) and Labree and Cole (1989), several elements point to the fact that schools were deliberately created to serve the interests of the capitalist systems such as the one Karl Marx challenged (see Drew, 2023; Chernoff, 2013). Today, not much within educational contexts has changed despite many critiques faulting this theory as outdated and probably lacking empirical evidence. Although capitalism is mostly attached to Marxism and the Marxist tradition (see Drew, 2023; Chernoff, 2013; Mackenzie and Gabriel, 2017), some modern organizations and schools continue to function like offshoots of the seminal capitalist organizations with some nominal modifications here and there, hence qualifying them as neo-capitalist organizations within the neoliberal economies (see Roberts and Peters, 2008). Specifically, Bowles and Gintis identified a number of features that help classify schools as replicas of capitalist workplaces. For example, they identified the availability of hierarchy within the schooling and working spaces as being similar in terms of structures and lines of command. In education, there is a clear hierarchy of authority in which the headmaster, principal, vice chancellor, and/or rector, depending on education levels, are usually at the top of the ladder, followed by registrars, assistant registrars, deans, deputy deans, directors, coordinators, HoDs, HoSs, academic staff, support staff, and students at the bottom. Similarly, among the

students, they also have an internal hierarchical system comprising the student representative councilors at the top, their deputies, then committee members, class representatives, and the laity at the bottom. At the workplace, hierarchy is also apparent, with the boss (CEO) at the top and different levels of management and coordinators beneath them, while the rest of the workers rot at the bottom, usually forming triangle-like structures. Some lucky employees may be given supervisory roles similar to those of SRC leaders or Class Reps in schools, which are usually short-term and on the basis of delegation.

Second, there are also issues of rewards, motivations, sanctions, and punishments in schools, just as the Correspondence Theory had established. For instance, students are rewarded with good grades, house points, certificates, and verbal praise whenever they outperform others academically and/or non-academically, especially through hard work, discipline, and/or seemingly approved behavior. Bowles and Gintis argued that this does not mean that such students are not academically the best or necessarily the best performers but are rewarded because of their unequivocal compliance, subservience, punctuality, perseverance, discipline, and blind loyalty. Conversely, some students receive different sanctions and punishments, usually for some perceived disruptive behavior, some of which might otherwise have been considered innovative from a different perspective. Similarly, at the workplace, employees are rewarded for demonstrating good behavior and hard work through promotion, pay raises, bonuses, allowances, 13th checks, leadership roles, and training opportunities. Such rewards come forth because the employees have done what the bosses instructed, for working tirelessly like machines without complaining of poor working conditions and/or for reporting and knocking off late even when the environment is unbearably dehumanizing. In addition, workers may sometimes undergo disciplinary procedures or even lose their jobs whenever they are perceived to have committed a felony or an offense against the code of conduct, another set of subjective norms created by some immoral groups of people in potentially authoritarian boardrooms. The workers' case here replicates what usually happens in schools where students are also rewarded or expelled for being perceived as having broken some codes of ethics. Because of their schooling experiences, such workers find nothing problematic with these events as they are edified in their blood during old school days.

While the case in Malawi's ODL system may demonstrate significant changes, the overall environment and its activities do resemble the ones Bowles and Gintis were describing (see Chizengo, 2023; Chibambo, 2023a,b; Zozie, 2020; Chibambo and Divala, 2020a,b, 2023; MZUNI ODeL Draft Report, 2023).

For example, economic tensions among university management, facilitators, the ODL directorate, and students exemplify ongoing systemic epistemological injustices that have persisted since 2011. These issues mainly include delayed compensation for lecturers, inadequate payments, excessive workloads with holiday forfeitures, the removal of royalties on already-utilized publications. Additionally, staff and students are often forced to use mandatory platforms such as IMIS and Moodle platforms despite these systems' known deficiencies, with little regard for the diverse economic, age, and cultural backgrounds of users. Other challenges include delayed exam results, missing grades, and the use of divide-and-rule tactics by management to create a disorganized and divided workforce. Collectively, these practices indicate a system designed to exploit those who serve and depend on it. Evidence from the ODL Official WhatsApp Forum

further reveals chronic staff frustration with curriculum practices that economically exploit both lecturers and students, reducing them to mere pawns in sustaining the institution's systemic inefficiencies.

It is concerning to note that some members of staff deliberately choose to play mercenary roles as foot soldiers for the oppressors while crucifying their colleagues who seem critical of the neo-capitalist system. These mercenaries have ready physical and online access to the authorities. They are often well equipped to tactically downplay complaints by fellow staff members while weakening the united front to resolve such grievances. Such events were already covered by Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Karl Marx in the capitalist discourses (see Drew, 2023; Chernoff, 2013). For Marx, it is normal for any capitalist system to deliberately plant mercenaries within the middle-class workers and/or indeed have volunteer mercenaries who work to advance the agenda of the capitalists to protect reciprocal interests. For Bowles and Gintis, the mercenaries are a symbol of miseducation, as schools have prepared them to be docile, gullible, and convertible beings who are usually ready to work against their colleagues so long as they get rewarded for playing such base and abominable acts (see Chernoff, 2013; Drew, 2013, 2023; Chibambo, 2023a,b).

Bowles and Gintis identified passivity, docility, and gullibility as key aspects of education that corrupt prospective workers' minds. For example, schools have managed to train people mainly because of the nature of their rewards, such as recognition, certificates, and material gifts. Thus, students recognize that if they fail to behave properly, work hard, and comply with all school rules and regulations, they may not pass the exams and get the certificates and/or receive physical rewards in a short term. Sometimes, they are afraid that they may not be given positive references and recommendations from the schools if they do not behave in the way expected by the authorities. Furthermore, HEIs have often discouraged creativity and complaints while encouraging respect and subservience, and this is exactly the case with employers who are usually interested in docile, uncritical, and resilient workers who cannot challenge them should anything go wrong. Essentially, employers already know how workers do their work without any substantive complaints, even when the conditions are exploitative. This is the case because such workers had already been trained in schools to persevere, be docile, and accommodate the worst nonsense from the authorities. For example, even when the Malawi currency is devalued by 44% and above, and the government gives public servants a miserable 12% salary increment, such workers will become content, celebrate, thank their employers for the increment, and finally put in more effort than ever before. This resonates with Bertrand Russell's (see Russell, 1934) argument in The *Root Causes of the Great Depression and the Conduct of labour*:

> *The root cause of the matter is very simple. Labour is enormously more productive than it used to be, but wages have not risen proportionately to what the labour produces. This is true not only of manual workers but also of all except those who possess ultimate economic power, the owners of minerals-the men who control credit, in short, the industrial magnates. Otherwise, everybody is producing more than their salary or wages allow them to consume because the system has been designed to corrupt the workers.* (p. 191)

Arguably, motivation and rewards have formed part of the education systems to corrupt the minds of the students as future capitalist workers and the teachers as both victims of neo-capitalism

and accomplices of the capitalist scheme. For example, universities have often encouraged the idea that the motivation to do well is an extrinsic affair but not an intrinsic one. This is often seen through awarding good marks and qualifications to students who seem disciplined, obedient, and/or hard-working. However, there has been limited effort to encourage the idea that there might be intrinsic values associated with education/knowledge, and that is learning for its own sake and/or the feeling that a job well done is, by itself, satisfying, as suggested by Kant's Duty for the Sake of Duty. Given this kind of schooling experience, workers have been encouraged to look for external validation through salaries, bonuses, and/or some special favors whenever they have achieved certain goals rather than the work itself. While work within the capitalist contexts has never been fulfilling and inspiring, it is also evident that many workers have often pretended to enjoy work simply because it is their first job, or they have remained unemployed for a long time, or they are less qualified for that job, and/or they have chosen to live in false hopes that one day they will be like the employers themselves, and hence oppress others.

Most importantly, such employees seem to enjoy work simply because schools have taught them to seek pleasure and contentment with the little they have and in anticipation of extrinsic motivations. This is a key maxim to the Marxist Theory of Capitalism, in which Karl Marx argued that most workers would have loved to do fulfilling work had it not been for schools and capitalism to corrupt their minds (see Drew, 2023). This implies that schools have all along indoctrinated humans by isolating their being human from work because they function as *hanging cogs in a larger system*; for example, one piece in an assembly line of pieces (see Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Labree and Cole, 1989).

Another key aspect of the Correspondence Theory is fragmentation and disunity in education. For example, how knowledge in the curriculum is organized and fragmented shows that capitalists have had ill motives. Indeed, students learn knowledge from uncoordinated disciplines, and making connections between subjects is sometimes difficult and discouraging. It is also hard for students to make connections between the courses, teaching methodologies, and outcomes. On the other hand, the workplace is similarly fragmented, and workers function with little knowledge of what else is happening in the process, in the other departments, and why things happen that way. This is part of the alienation processes under capitalism, and it helps the bourgeois (owners of production) to easily control the disjointed proletariats (workers). While team workers can easily create new products, no one worker has an overview of the whole production process in a given workplace. Although functionalists would support this kind of arrangement as being normal in any social system (see Drew, 2023), they still fail to account for the exploitative relationships between employers and employees.

Criticism of the correspondence theory

The common argument against Bowles and Gintis is that these people conducted their study in 1976, and their findings may be outdated today. They also argue that the modern workplace differs from the 1970s, although some jobs still resemble the 1970s. Others contend that while modern education is accused of being too obsolete for the current socio-economic needs, it does not necessarily resemble the Correspondence Theory (Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer, 2019). Furthermore, Ken Robinson argues that since current education systems

have been criticized for being driven by industrialization principles, hence discounting critical thinking and the need for 21st-century skills and knowledge, it may also imply that the modern workplace and its demands have also significantly changed, which cannot be explained through the Correspondence Theory. Even then, this criticism can be inverted to mean that the education system has remained unchanged as Bowles and Gintis had described it; hence, their findings still hold water. Other critics have argued that the focus of modern education's curriculum, pedagogies, and practices is substantially different from that of the 1970s. For example, students are now encouraged to participate in dialogues and debates, report maladministration and maltreatment to solve problems, and so on. Although this point sounds genuine, some studies have shown that most education systems, including those utilizing f2f alongside ODL, have remained behind in the promotion of democratic education practices and have adopted curriculum practices that are dehumanizing and epistemologically unjust for the students and teachers, and such cases are common in Malawi's ODL contexts (see Chibambo and Divala, 2023; Chirwa and Naidoo, 2014). On these bases, the Correspondence Theory remains an essential theory of education for analyzing and understanding unjust practices within HEIs and ODL. Since this section mainly aimed to illuminate the Correspondence Theory, the sections after the FEM and ITEM will be dedicated to explaining how these three theories have played out within the context of HEIs and ODL in Malawi and elsewhere.

The factory model of education as theoretical propositions for analyzing ODL in Malawi

The Factory Education Model (FEM), also known as the Factory Model Schools (FMSs), are historical terms that emerged in the mid-20th century and have been used by scholars who advocate for education transformations (see Strauss, 2015; Schneider, 2024; Schneider, 2019). FEM has also pointed to characteristics of a European education system that emerged in the late 18th century and North America in the mid-19th century. It typically utilized top-down or Pipes management model to achieve social needs, age-based needs, liberal arts curriculum, and outcomes, as reflected in the outcomes-based education model (OBE). Essentially, FEM was metaphorically used to hint at the negative aspects of the education systems of that time. FEM was also designed to create docile citizens and factory workers who would serve the interests of the capitalist movement (see New York Times, 2012), just like the Correspondence Theory. It is also assumed that FEM was used to demonstrate that education systems resisted transformation in line with the modern demands of society (Washington Post, 2019; Schneider, 2024; Schneider, 2017). Some researchers have, however, disagreed with the proponents of FEM as being a misrepresentation of American education systems (Strauss, 2020; Rose, 2015; Schneider, 2024; Sherman and Gamson, 2024; Dorn, 2018; Dorn, 2011; Taylor, 2001; The Washington Post, 2019; Upitis, 2007; Upitis, 2004).

Tracing the genesis of factory education

FEM was first publicly used to describe K-12 education by Dr. Howard Lamb in a speech in September 1972. *The Greenville News*

reported that teacher training institutes in the USA were now producing teachers for the 1920 factory workspaces. According to Robinson (1972), Theresa Jablonski carried a news article in the *Herald News Paper* in which he used FEM to describe the college education of that time. It is not clear, though, if Jablonski and Lamb coined this term. Even then, their use represented the maiden appearance in the main media outlets. Since then, FEM has also been used by education leaders, including Marilyn Roth of the National Education Association (NEA) in 1987 (see Carter, 1987). Later, an article by Hart (1989) presented Dr. Leslie Howard connecting FEM to Mann's experiences in Prussia in 1843. Howard has since then been cited by many philosophers as the creator of the term FEM. Thereafter, the president of the American Federation for Teachers (AFT), Shanker, used FEM in 1989 in his speech describing overdue revolutions in information technologies, which necessitated the need to restructure schools that functioned as obsolete factories. Recently, Dintersmith (2018) and Cuban (2014, 2019a,b) have also used images of FEM to describe the transformation of education systems. These images have linked FEM to 1893, the year when NEA first published its final report on the training of factory workers. Other scholars have also attempted to link FEM to child-labor laws, factories, tax-funded schools, and compulsory education laws such as those by Godin (2012).

Furthermore, Gatto (2003) has also linked FEM to a number of socio-economic and cultural injustices while linking them to Horace Mann and his Prussian factory experiences. Since then, Gatto has also been cited by several researchers (see Rose, 2015; Goyal, 2016; Upitis, 2007; Upitis, 2004) who have also used FEM to emphasize the need for education reforms in the modern age. That aside, Gatto failed to explain how he concluded that Mann wanted American schools to function like Prussian factories.

FEM as a metaphor

There is also evidence that shows FEM has been used metaphorically to portray covert practices within educational contexts. For example, the animation by Robinson, during the TED Talks, has often compared students to factory raw materials and referred to dates of examinations as a sorting mechanism. Furthermore, Callahan in *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (see Callahan, 1962, as cited in Shanker, 1989; Marshall, 1990) explored the relationship between schooling and scientific management in the 1910s and has included quotes by educators who referred to students as raw materials meant to be mold into something better (Cubberley, 1998). Cubberley further observes that a methodical scientific management approach may become the best option for addressing problems associated with increased access to education to achieve desired outcomes. He wrote:

> Schools are now, in a sense, factories wherein raw materials are being fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of 21st-century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its raw materials to the specifications laid down by the factory world (Cubberley, 1998).

Later, Frederick Taylor's time management theory, also known as *Taylorism* theory, began to influence multiple aspects of society and

education management in the USA. The main argument of this theory is that any problem in life can be resolved by dividing it into smaller units against its time and costs. Lillian and Gilbreth later utilized this theory on parenting projects and found it cheap and effective. Again, a group of English teachers aggregated how much time they spent on grading papers and used their findings to lobby education managers for more time for grading tasks and feedback time. While teachers used T*aylorism* to their advantage, they also trashed it for its impact on their work (Kan, 1913). For instance, Haley (1903) blamed education managers for failing to recognize teachers' hard work, the tendency to advance the ideals of FEM, and their automation of teachers as mere factory tools whose duty was to work mechanically without questioning the authority (also see Friesen, 2008; Feenberg, 2002; Peters, 1998). In this regard, Haley used the term "factory-izing education" as a metaphor, not as a direct comparison to the factory work environment but rather supporting the notion of FEM. These arguments resonate well with the Malawi ODL experiences in which the use of IMIS and Moodle has been made mandatory for the lecturers and students, disregarding their individual differences and levels of preparedness, often treating them as mechanical objects and as production tools/implements rather than rational and agentive animals (see Feenberg, 2002; Feenberg, 1999).

However, the theory of Taylorism has been criticized for its usability and effectiveness in education, arguing that its effectiveness remains under-researched. Likewise, "social engineering" and "scientific management," as reflected in Taylorism, need to be contextualized within the Critical Race Theory, especially those targeting gender, race, sex, LGBTQ, and disability, among others.

Although FEM did not emerge as a dominant theoretical framework until the 1980s, Tyack laid its foundational context in his book called *The History of American Urban Education* (see Tyack, 1974). Just as the 18th-century theologians viewed God as a clockmaker with unwavering conviction, social engineers of the time, in their pursuit of new organizational forms, used terms such as "machines" and "factories" without fully considering the potential negative implications of such analogies. Similarly, Larry Cuban associated FEM with a particular mindset regarding the purpose of education, one that ultimately proved detrimental to educational practices. As Kaestle (1983, p. 69) added:

> *Schools have thus become, in some respects, factories, but not necessarily mimicking factories or preparing our children for factory work, but because the workplace, schools, and other institutions have often partaken the same ethos of efficiency, exploitation, manipulation, mastery, and rule-following.*

The above analyses demonstrate that HEIs, in general, have often operated using FEM approaches and that both workers and students have existed as fungible raw materials (objects) and automated machines (robots) that the authorities and school managers can control, manipulate and use to their advantage. More dangerously, these realities are common within ODL contexts in Malawi, wherein lecturers and students have been reduced to machines that operate on socially engineered templates and remote controls. As machines, they are there to generate resources for running the universities while converting their labor into goods and services for sale and profits (see Drew, 2023). Additionally, FEM has been recognized by the US Federal Government as Osborn-the advisor to President Clinton, had used this term to advocate for a voucher system of education to support needy students. These realities demonstrate that FEM and Correspondence Theory (CT) have had significant similarities and influences within education systems, especially in ODL, where their presence is inescapable, and have led to serious epistemological inequalities (see Peters, 1998; Kaestle, 1983; Bowles and Gintis, 1976, 2003). Importantly, FEM, like ITEM (see Peters, 1998), has also identified the presence of automation, capitalization, profitization, control, line management, quality control, and marketization in HEIs, which have also characterized ODL models in Malawi and elsewhere. Peters seems to suggest that the inclusion such terms in ITEM is meant to help educators explain and understand how neo-capitalism and neoliberal-minimalist policies have exacerbated human objectification and exploitation within ODL contexts in developing countries.

Criticism of the factory model of education

Although modern educators have used FEM as a metaphor rather than a philosophical movement, still there are at least two problems that have emanated from this theoretical proposition. For example, users of FEM have generally pointed to two scenarios as evidence for their use of this term: one of Horace Mann's Prussian reports in the 1840s and the 1892 Committee of Ten reports. Mann nevertheless presented his thoughts after his trip from Prussia in a report to the Massachusetts Board of Education. He filed several reports, and his 7th annual report of January 1844 focused on his experiences in Europe and Prussia (see Neem, 2018; Hack Education, 2015; Cuban, 2014, 2019a,b). In the *Seventh Report*, Mann did not mention any Prussian factories. He denounced the Prussian education system's ability to foster blind obedience to authority, arguing:

> *If Prussia can pervert the benevolent influences of education to the support of arbitrary power, we surely can employ them to support republican institutions. A national spirit of liberty can be cultivated more easily than a national spirit of bondage. If it may be made one of the great prerogatives of education to perform the unholy work of making slaves, then surely it must be one of the noblest instruments for rearing a nation of freemen. If moral power over the understandings and affections of the people may be turned to evil, it may not be employed for good* (Mann, 1892, p. 23).

While this alone is not sufficient to refute the claims that FEM practices currently exist and have previously informed education systems, it does challenge claims made by Gatto that Mann was eager to replicate a model of education that would train factory workers. Moreover, the NEA Report does not mention modeling schools after factories, a claim found in books that advocate for a dramatic change to American education systems (see Wagner and Dintersmith, 2015). Accordingly, factories of Mann's time and the Common School Movement do not fully resemble modern factories and schools. The most serious discrepancy between schools and factories of the 1840s is the *'Invented History of the Factory Model of Education'* by Watters. While historians have assumed different perspectives on the influence of manufacturers on the rise of the Common School Movement, there is also a consensus that the focus of education then and today has been on general knowledge and citizenship, not the specific skills required by factories (see Neem, 2018), an argument that still holds (see Chibambo, 2024). Modern education systems have also been faulted

for failing to produce 21st-century skilled workers who can function effectively in the 21st century era that has been characterized by volatility, uncertainties, complexities, and ambiguities (VUCA), and that such accusations should metaphorically be construed as an admission that schools have remained unreformed and are breeding grounds for epistemological injustices just like FEM had done.

Industrialized teaching and learning model of distance education

Conceived by Peters (1998), ITEM has been used by different scholars in different ways. While ITEM is generally a negative metaphor, some scholars have deliberately twisted its use to describe the positive aspects of ODL. It is clear that ODL, as a form of ITEM, emerged some decades ago during the Industrial Revolution and that it aimed to serve the needs of capitalism (see Peters, 1998). Most recently, debates about ODL policies and practices have also intensified (Peters, 1989; Campion et al., 1993). These debates have gained ground simply because aspects of industrialization are not in relation to ODL and f2f education systems. Unique to the ITEM is its ability to illuminate characteristics of ODL models and their management systems in relation to epistemological injustices.

Tracing the genesis of ITEM of ODL

When ODL was still undermined by traditional academics and society in the 1960s, despite its 70-year history, it was often trivial to talk about it in public spaces, let alone trigger some academic debates. Due to recent developments, including the need for universal access to education, international support, and increased access to HEIs, there has been increased interest among researchers in ODL. It has, therefore, become necessary to examine *structural differences* and the reasons ODL continues to make headlines in society. For example, there is a need to ask why ODL had to develop in the mid-19th century *outside* the popular f2f institution's schooling systems. If we tow the Socratic line, we come across the first indications of the structural nature of ODL. Unique to ODL is also that it has never been provisioned with state funding for a long time, as is the case with traditional f2f institutions, such that students have had to pay for their own education. This means most ODL systems were designed in such a way that they serve under open-market policies and neo-liberalism to generate income and profits for sustaining the universities. Since the pioneers of ODL were initially capitalists, it may not be off the hook to cliam that they had commercial interests attached to ODL operations (see Peters, 1994). Since these capitalists recognized the economic value of ODL compared to the f2f delivery, they were therefore prepared to use innovative teaching methods such as those used in factories to increase production and, in this case, to accommodate as many students as possible who would then help break even and create profits following the laws of economies of scale (see Chizengo, 2023; Chibambo, 2023a,b; Msiska, 2015). It is, however, difficult to imagine how a radical shift from f2f to ODL would have happened, given that education has historically been in the hands of pedantic teachers within physical classroom spaces. According to ITEM, there also has been a need for a *division of labor to plan, develop, teach, and mark assignments and tests within ODL contexts.* Likewise, the development of instructional materials has been left in

the hands of expert teachers who usually follow a given house style for quality, identity, and uniformity. These have often replicated the *planning*, preparation, and production process within factory contexts, which experts also do through the division of labor.

While f2f teachers were physically present in traditional settings, the delivery in ODL has shifted to mechanized and automated channels. The fact that technical specifications control these experts and that instructional materials effectively stand in for teachers within ODL contexts implies that educators are themselves governed by the social engineering principles of Taylorism inherent in the Factory Education Model (FEM). While teaching has mainly been an individualized affair in f2f contexts in ODL it has been *standardized*, *normalized,* and *formalized*. If teaching is a unique event in the subjective experience of different participants within the traditional classrooms, then in ODL, it has become objectified or is offered to every participant using well-defined instructional materials that can be used and reused at one's convenience. By "objectification," Peters sought to demonstrate that teaching had been transformed into a tangible product, capable of modification, optimization, and commodification, similar to physical goods. Since then, ODL institutions have embarked on advertising, branding, and globalizing their products and services to maximize sales. This shift has materialized with the rise of neoliberal minimalism that emerged between the 19th and 20th centuries, fundamentally transforming the landscape of ODL institutions.

Moreover, technologies and other business-like innovations have also significantly transformed educators traditional practices and roles. Yet, ODL providers have had to rationalize their teaching approaches due to the diversities of the students and the emergence of agile technologies amidst the demands posed by neoliberal-minimalist policies on education (see Chibambo, 2023a,b). They thus had to use *machines-* the printing press for mass production and transport mechanisms for distributing instruction while attracting huge numbers of students for profiteering (see Peters, 1967; Chibambo, 2023a,b; Chizengo, 2023). Together, these elements have made ODL the most industrialized form of teaching, hence reconfirming the presence of ITEM and FEM.

This theory was later confirmed by ODL universities, which were founded in the 1970s, such as the Open University of the UK, the Indira Gandhi Open University, and other mega and giga universities. Essentially, the need for mass production of instructional modules, graduates, and *mass* consumption of goods and services within educational contexts has become common in this era. It is not surprising then that to date, we have Mega and Giga ODL Universities across the globe and they have managed to enroll thousands of students (see Simpson, 2015; Chibambo, 2016). Some of these universities have collaborated with giant technological companies such as Google, Microsoft, and others to make education universally accessible to everyone. Furthermore, Raggatt (1993, p. 21) has characterized ODL universities using the OUUK features. For example, he identifies restrictions to standard products, application of methods of mass production, automation, division of labor, planning, management, control and hierarchy, bureaucracy, and profits as those elements that make ODL resemble the FEM and workplace politics. Besides these, course offerings have been restricted and printed in a *single* printing run, mainly to achieve the philosophy of publishing and mass production; that is, the higher the volume of prints, the lower the costs one will incur during production. These printed courses would then be used for over 8 years against the standard

5-year term obtained in f2f contexts; hence, education costs have been contained. Thus, increased production of longer standardized courses for relatively large homogeneous groups of students has usually made a significant difference economically. Raggatt (1993) further describes this arrangement as *Fordism* since all ODL universities have worked more or less in accordance with this form of industrialization.

Establishing the links between ITEM and ODL systems in Malawi and South Africa

Firstly, it should be stated that ITEM has several maxims, such as planning, mass production, line management, coordination, corporatization, advertising, objectification, mechanization, automation, profitization, marginal returns, production, and others. Using some or all of these maxims, different researchers have sought to establish the relationships between FEM, Correspondence Theory, and ITEM. For example, Sewart (1993, p. 229) has argued that mass production in ODL is concerned not only with the production of modules but also with degrees, graduates, research outputs, and other IGAs. There is also a division of labor, specialization, and increased alienation between teachers and students, much the same way Bowles and Gintis (1976) and the FEM (see Cubberley, 1998) have established. For Farnes (1993, p. 10), different industrial revolutions have had serious implications on HEIs, even though such revolutions have helped HEIs overcome access to education problems to some degree. Thus, ITEM has usually represented the best way to meet the demands of universal access to education while withholding the actual substance of that education, including epistemological access (Perraton, 2002; Chibambo, 2023a,b; du Plooy and Zilindile, 2014). Similarly, Rumble (1995, p. 19) and Rumble (1989) also contends that industrialization is not only unique to ODL but also in f2f classroom contexts, and since industrialization has permeated into f2f classrooms, then characterizing ODL as ITEM on this basis may be misleading. Moreover, characterizing ODL as the most ITEM-ized delivery mode may also be questionable since modern ODL systems have been significantly transformed through the use of interactive technologies, which have provided real-time opportunities for dialogue and debates (Zozie, 2020).

While the presence of ITEM within f2f universities cannot be disputed, its influence is much more insignificant than within ODL contexts. These developments simply confirm how industrialized methods of thinking have infiltrated and altered all aspects of work and human life. This way, ITEM should no longer be used to mean the application of principles of industrialization into ODL but rather as a metaphor that explains the whole education process and its relationships with the processes of industrialization. Either way, constitutive features of ITEM and processes of industrialization are linked to one another in a systematic sequence and manner. Industrialized teaching, therefore, may mean careful planning on the division of labor, costly development, and objectivization through a medium, which makes teaching a product that can be mass-produced in the same way as physical goods, which are warehoused, mass-distributed, evaluated, and optimized.

More equally so, lecturers can no longer fruitlessly attempt to insulate their knowledge (specialization) given the proliferation of OERs and AI tools; nor should they avoid solving problems with their juniors (a division of labor); nor should they not share and cocreate

knownledge with their students and communities using different media assistants (mechanization or automation), all of which reflect the power of ITEM. However, these aspects have remained nominally influential within F2f teaching contexts, unlike in ODL. Thus, in ODL, ITEM takes substantial structural patterns that emanate from the industrial revolutions and neo-capitalist principles, thereby promulgating objectification, control, and manipulation among the students and lecturers.

We can also point to the major structural differences between f2f and ODL universities regarding teaching experiences. For example, no matter how many technologies f2f universities can adopt, teaching has mostly remained oral and babysitting, similar to ancient civilization. For ODL, it takes place in a *coded* and *media* form and happens only based on a bundle of industrialized processes. Therefore, ITEM has brought forth the peculiarities of the most industrialized teaching, which is explainable through industrial sociological observations with recourse to Habermas' Communicative Action (see Peters, 1968, p. 62). Thus, while f2f universities use *communicative* actions (see Habermas, 1990), which grew out of the oral culture and are therefore elemental in f2f education contexts, in ODL, it is thus only possible based on *instrumentally rational* (carefully thought processes) *and strategic actions*, which have to be imparted through technologies and other mediating media forms.

Most importantly, Habermas' categories that he used to describe the industrialized society of the f2f tradition, such as the communicative structure of oral teaching, can be described as follows: (a) reciprocal behavioral expectations and societal norms determine it; (b) it brings about the internalization of roles and uses an *inter-subjectively divided language of communication*. In ODL, the communicative structure is different since (a) the actions of the teachers and students are determined by technically and mechanically structured rules, (b) it is a question of skills and qualifications and *context-free language use,* and this difference is decisive, (c) and finally, it is the result of an industrial process that makes teaching and learning possible within ODL contexts. While work processes outside education contexts *can* be industrialized to the extent that they reminisce about the intensity of f2f university work, in ODL, the work has been more intensive and highly industrialized than in the former educational context. For example, Rumble (1989, 1995) refers to work processes such as editing, printing, and distribution as aspects of ITEM in ODL simply because he is interested in the management of teaching and learning systems. As educators, we must, therefore, leverage the elements of ITEM that have fostered interaction between teachers and students, not those that work to promulgate exploitation and subjugation of the students and teachers. In doing so, we can classify teaching at f2f universities as pre-industrial, while that of ODL has assumed the post/industrial form. Briefly, these arguments suggest that when we begin to treat ITEM as both a descriptive theory of education practices as well as a metaphor that illuminates covert and overt education policies and practices, we may be better positioned to transform the ODL delivery mode from the fangs of oppressive theorizing as those hitherto discussed in this study. Indeed, the effects of the CT, FEM, and ITEM have been visible in Malawi's ODL context, ranging from the module production process to students support and lecturer services and recognition, all of which have sought to mechanically control the workers while attempting to convert their labor into products and services that can be sold at a high profit for

the benefit of the university but not the workers and the consumers themselves (Drew, 2023; Drew, 2013).

Quick reflections on the industrialized teaching model of ODL

The concept of ITEM has thus far provided ODL experts with a descriptive picture of their practices and how such actions have been perceived differently within different education contexts. Structurally, ODL has followed specific regulations that provide significant opportunities for instructors and students. Those educators who once thought were pedagogically superior, such as the old-school masters of f2f contexts (Freire, 2005), began to recognize the hidden *fortes* inherent in ODL through the lenses of ITEM, which must be acknowledged. However, it has not been easy for the proponents of ODL to accept that this system has had its own structural inadequacies, just like the f2f delivery modes. As argued in our previous studies (see Chibambo and Divala, 2020a,b; Chibambo, 2024), the common practices by regulatory bodies to evaluate ODL programmes based on instruments that were tailored for f2f contexts should be questioned as they tend to disadvantage ODL students. This pre-industrial assessment criteria, in which all programmes are measured using a one-size-fits-all approach, ought to be condemned if at all ODL is to be liberated from such oppressive practices as is the case with the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) in Malawi.

Teaching to transgress: engaged pedagogy and critical pedagogy as a theoretical proposition for undoing the FEM and ITEM effects

hooks (1994) contends that education should be a practice of freedom or an opportunity for students to bring their mind, body, and soul into the classroom and take action against systems of power relations and oppression. Significant evidence suggests that hooks was largely influenced by Paulo Freire, who is considered the father of emancipatory education (Critical Pedagogy) (see Freire, 2005), and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Freire asserts that schools are political spaces as they aim to advance the political and economic interests of the authorities. Freire proposes that students be taught to locate sources of excessive power, control, and oppression. In a critique of the *banking model of education*, a metaphor to describe f2f practices wherein students become passive recipients of knowledge who simply memorize and repeat whatever is deposited into their empty heads (bank accounts), Freire calls for pedagogical practices that promote dialogue, continuous questioning, debates, problem-posing, and critical thinking and calls it pedagogy as a practice of freedom. These ideas sparked bell hooks imagination to argue that all students are active participants in the pursuit of knowledge, not just consumers. hooks, like Freire, believed that education can only be liberating if educators allow their students to have a voice and create a community of shared knowledge and experiences. Similarly, Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of Engaged Buddhism views the teacher as a healer and believes in holistic education, which joins the mind, the body, and the soul of both the students and the teachers. This helped hooks acknowledge students not only as sub-humans who

were ready to gain knowledge from the knowers but also as full-grown human beings who could live their lives to the fullest. hooks then proposes a theory for education called "Engaged Pedagogy," which exceeds critical and feminist pedagogies as it emphasizes the essence of wellbeing of both parties in education. She also proposes that students must have a voice and become active participants in the pursuit of knowledge. This way, teachers may only engage with the students in self-care and mindfulness, known as self-actualization, to empower them. hooks further argues that teachers cannot teach students to be self-actualized and open to vulnerability if they do not practice self-actualization.

Progressive teachers are thus willing to take risks by viewing education as an act of resistance against the oppressive practices of the f2f education systems. Specifically, *Teaching to Transgress*, as a theoretical metaphor, advocates that teachers should dismantle the myth that they are the ultimate authorities of knowledge and the sole creators and disseminators of learning, both inside and outside the classroom. This perspective aligns with the critical educational philosophies of Freire and Rancière.

Reconstituting FEM and ITEM through the use of engaged pedagogy as theoretical propositions

In the previous sections, we have observed that the Correspondence Theory (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Labree and Cole, 1989), the FEM (Cubberley, 1998), and the ITEM (Peters, 1988, 1998, 2002) share significant similarities. For example, the critiques raised by Bowles and Gintis, as well as the principles underpinning FEM and ITEM, remain largely uncontested, despite attempts by some scholars to dismiss them using superficial evidence, often citing the age of the research, shifts in educational and workplace contexts, or a lack of recent empirical studies.

However, these criticisms are largely unfounded, as they rely on technicalities rather than addressing the core arguments. This tendency reflects a common flaw among positivist and empiricist researchers, who frequently seek to discredit conceptual studies—perhaps because such research is not only more challenging but also represents a more rigorous approach to generating knowledge. Indeed, there might be some changes to the schooling contexts, for example, the abolition of corporal punishment in favor of democratic practices (see Maphosa and Shumba, 2010); however, these are not enough reasons to dispute the many curriculum practices that still influence human conduct in the schools, at work, and in society today. For instance, Chibambo and Divala (2023a) observed that education systems in Malawi have not been able to prepare active and critical citizens who can participate in public life and make informed decisions about their sense of agency.

In ODL contexts, the development of instructional materials and examinations that do not promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills, coupled with exploitative labor policies, are some of the key issues that entrap ODL within the FEM and ITEM traps. Additionally, internal disunity among staff and divisions over how to challenge repressive policies often undermine collective efforts to address grievances, much like the dynamics observed in FEM, ITEM, and Correspondence Theory. These divisions are not unique to ODL but reflect the varying

educational backgrounds, school types, and programmes that academics have experienced. Those who opt to align themselves with oppressive systems may have been subjected to a form of miseducation, as critiqued by thinkers like Bowles and Gintis, bell hooks, Freire, and Peters. These individuals, acting as "mercenaries," become obstacles to emancipatory movements within HEIs contexts (see Drew, 2023; Chernoff, 2013). While the majority of academics might have graduated from f2f universities, it is also undeniable that they, by default, underwent ODL since normative PhD programmes are self-regulated and research-based; hence their FEM-atic and ITEM-atic syndrome might have emanated from overt Taylorism and social engineering. Furthermore, Chibambo and Divala (2020a,b) and Chibambo (2023a,b), have also observed that within ODL contexts in Malawi, instructional materials production is highly mechanical, reminiscing FEM and ITEM processes (Holmberg, 2005). There has also been mass production of modules, mass enrollment of students, mass production of graduates, and mass production of assignments and examinations, all of which do not match the number of workers on the floor, reminiscent of the capitalist politics reflected in Karl Marx's Capitalism, FEM, and ITEM (see Drew, 2023; Peters, 1998; Eagleton, 2011; Fryer, 2007). Similarly, the economies of scale in which the number of staff is disproportionate to the number of students are deliberately designed to maximize revenue within ODL contexts, and by implication, students, and staff do not get equivalent services and compensation, respectively. Furthermore, there are structural hierarchies ranging from VCs, DVCs, directors, deans, HoDs, academics, printmen, and students, and the reporting structure is too definitive such that the question of autonomy rarely arises. These observations are equally made by the CT, FEM, and ITEM, all of which have faulted schools for the mess inherent in the job market. Furthermore, students in Malawi's ODL contexts are required to submit their assignments via post-office or email based on strict deadlines. These assignments also have specific page numbers, word limits, font types, and referencing styles. Those who fail to meet these specifications are usually sanctioned, punished, warned, and sometimes made to repeat the module. In the worst scenarios, they are withdrawn from the university on academic grounds, often known as *weeding*. While these are also common practices in the f2f delivery modes in Malawi, the severity of such issues is obnoxious within ODL contexts, and they do contravene the principles of natural laws of justice upon which ODL is founded. For example, the philosophies of openness, autonomy, freedom of choice, independence, self-control, and actualization have always remained illusionary (see Holmberg, 1995). These philosophies assume that ODL should be open, flexible, liberating, and just for all students to manage their own learning without any instructional, administrative, or structural obstacles. As a democratic system, ODL students are supposed to set their own learning objectives, goals, and pace, and should they fail to meet these objectives, the worst they could do is to repeat that module until they get it right, but not weeding them as is the case in Malawi. By *weeding* students from their studies, ODL has deliberately gone against the maxims of the Correspondence Theory by unleashing sanctions on innocent students much the same way employers do to their employees who contravene organization policies.

Likewise, ODL students in Malawi are forced to take programmes they did not apply for, often known as rerouting. They accept these offers not because they enjoy them but rather because they are the only option available for them to migrate from poverty to prosperity, as often propagated by human capital theorists (see Walker, 2012). This observation is also made by both FEM and the CT, who argue that students, similar to workers, do their tasks not because they enjoy themselves but rather because of extrinsic motivations such as salaries, bonuses, promotion, recognition, examination grades, degree certificates, and other extrinsic motivations. Borrowing from Kant's Duty for the Sake of Duty theory, we find these hypothetical imperatives problematic, immoral, and objectifying to the students.

Lastly, as observed by Peters (1998), within ODL contexts, students and instructors are often treated as objects, especially when automation such as IMIS and Moodle are introduced. Education administrators usually tend to prioritize technologies over human welfare, and much of the investment has gone toward technologies. This way, both students and teachers are forced to embrace technologies and adapt to them even when there is limited support to provide them with the necessary tools and reskilling opportunities. Under such a milieu, any complaints against the limited capacity and effectualness of the IMIs or Moodle are often disregarded and sometimes underplayed as being born from technophobia or mere sabotage by the users (see Friesen, 2008; Feenberg, 1999). Yet the migration from paper-based operations to IMIS and Moodle has demonstrated the technologies' weaknesses and the mechanical treatment of human resources, replicating the fears raised by Bowles and Gintis, ITEM, and Taylorism. Indeed, there also have been frustrations among academic staff of different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds as the IMIS system keeps disappearing and deleting the already processed and uploaded data. As if that is not enough, some academics have been sanctioned and threatened to be punished for not meeting certain deadlines even when the system is perpetually inconsistent. Such treatment ramifies the importance many employers attach to technologies rather than human resources. As observed by ITEM critics (Feenberg, 1999, 2002) when modules are automated, repackaged into objectives (objects), then repurposed and marketed, and finally sold at pocket-breaking prices to desperate knowledge seekers (see Apple, 2001; Vally and Spreen, 2012), who had missed out on the higher education ladder, the only make-or-break option remains ODL. This is what Peters and Roberts (2008), Vally and Spreen (2012) and Chibambo (2023a,b), have labeled as epistemic commodification and/or epistemological neo-capitalism in education, which works through manipulation of the students and teachers through the use of polished false ideologies and promises.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the seminal ideas by Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Labree and Cole (1989) cannot just be dismissed as some critics have tried to do. Faulting these ideas based on the time the research was done, changes made to the education systems, changes in workplace conditions, and the fact that the authors did not do any empirical research are base tactics that have sought to downplay the hard-hitting lines inherent in the findings. Bowles and Gintis' findings,

just like many classical theories, including Maslow's Law of Needs and Isaac Newton's Law of Motion in Physics, have all remained indisputable among the strongest and most intelligent minds and still hold the central position in educational practices more than ever before. The fact that society is now at the forefront of accusing schools of ill-preparing graduates for the modern workplace is equally vindication that HEIs have been used to produce laborers who would serve the capitalist market while helping sustain their powerful positions. Unique to the CT is the argument that the question of merit or IQ in schools does not exist as the basis for rewarding the so-called merit workers and/or gifted students, which are subjective classification gimmicks based on biased assessment tools and procedures. What is rewarded in the schools and society may not count as merit but rather as blind unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline at the expense of creativity and innovation (see Chibambo and Divala, 2023). Thus, students or workers who are perceived to be difficult are often the ones who are disciplined, creative, and innovative and are, as such, punished for their truthfulness, ingenuity, and inquisitiveness.

Since ODL has been founded on the FEM and/or ITEM principles, we thus propose Engaged Pedagogy and and Teaching to Transgress by hooks (1994) as the best theoretical propositions for addressing the evils of these models. Given that hooks proposes an education that is anchored in dialogue, respect for humanity, dialogues, creativity, and overall well-being, her ideals have challenged oppressive, exploitative, and extortionist education practices that seek to treat students and teachers as lifeless machines worthy of objectification. These are the very practices that happen within ODL contexts in Malawi and elsewhere, and they do have the potential to serve as catalysts for epistemological injustices both at schools and in society.

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